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C O N F I D E N T I A L DUSHANBE 001646

SIPDIS

NSC FOR MERKEL; PLEASE PASS TO USAID

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: NO NEWS BAD NEWS FOR INTERNEWS

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Hoagland, Ambassador, US Embassy  
Dushanbe, State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b)

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[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: Internews is the third major NGO to encounter serious registration problems with the Tajik government. In addition, a key Internews project to establish community radio stations may collapse without the registration and licensing of its local partners. Government officials have confided to Internews staff that Ministry of Security officials forbade the Ministry of Justice to re-register Internews, allegedly declaring that Internews is "the enemy". The increased government obstruction of independent media bodes poorly for Tajikistan's image as an emerging democracy on the road to reform. END SUMMARY

[12.](#) (C) On October 5, Country Director Troy Etulain reported Internews attempted to re-register with the Ministry of Justice after a May investigation revealed Internews was operating under the wrong legal status. The Minister of Justice was prepared to accept Internews' new application, but at the last minute rejected it on technical grounds. MoJ officials told Internews the Ministry of Security directly intervened on the basis of "national security."

[13.](#) (SBU) In addition to the issue of registration, an \$887,000 State Department-funded project to establish six independent community radio stations throughout the country may not get off the ground due to bureaucratic obstacles. None of the local organizations have been able to register as legal organizations, let alone obtain a license to broadcast. Without the registration and license, they cannot broadcast legally. The long delayed new licensing regulations have been issued but not the implementation documents.

[14.](#) (C) Etulain reported local state media stations have started to refuse to accept programming from Internews directly and stopped broadcasting Internews materials months ago. However, the new second state television channel, Safina, has used Internews materials during its programming. He noted that as recently as last week, the Deputy Director of Safina approached him about a "creative partnership" to help with programming and technical training.

[15.](#) (C) According to Etulain, Safina has already cost the government \$1 million in new equipment and further funds to renovate the historic old philharmonic building in central Dushanbe as Safina's new production studio. He passed along the rumor that Safina may be sold to private investors early in 2006-and that the purchaser may be First Brother-in-Law Hasan Sadulloyev. (COMMENT: It has long been rumored that Sadulloyev would gain a license for the first private TV channel with national coverage in Tajikistan, but that he could not afford, or did not want to pay for, the start-up costs. END COMMENT)

[16.](#) (SBU) Etulain expressed frustration at his programs being "stuck" and admitted there was little Internews could do, short of withdrawing all the equipment from Tajikistan. This would however, eliminate almost any independent broadcast media in Tajikistan. "We are contractually obligated to do things we cannot do legally. We are trying to follow the law, but the Tajiks themselves are not following their own laws."

[17.](#) (SBU) Internews' licensing problems touch on a larger issue of the government's new licensing regime. According to Etulain, it explicitly states that foreign nationals or organizations "under the control" of foreign nationals cannot receive a license. The licensing regime applies to stations and well as production studios. The interpretation of "under the control" remains to be determined, but Etulain doubted the MoJ would recognize agreements like programming requirements attached to grants as anything other than direct control.

[18.](#) (SBU) NOTE: The licensing issue, including of production facilities, raises profound problems for Internews with its USAID-funded "Satellite Transmission Program." Independent Tajik television stations broadcasting "unlicensed" Internews-provided material direct from satellite would risk being closed by the

government for violating licensing regulations. END NOTE

19. (C) COMMENT: Post agrees with Etulain's assessment that a concerted governmental campaign against Internews is underway. The clear and consistent pattern of government obstruction, using legal pretexts for a political result, sends a dangerous message the very few journalists and civil society members willing to go to the mat for a free press and access to information. However, some in the government seem to understand that NGOs are not the source of "Color Revolutions" and help maintain a balance against the true hardliners. END COMMENT

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